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Place-Based Environmentalism:
An Ethnographic Phenomenological Study of
Environmental Attitudes and Behaviors
of the Rural, Agricultural Landscape

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Place-Based Environmentalism



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To my family - Who have shown me the beauty of this place and the importance of investing in it, and its people.

ABSTRACT

This study focuses on the culture, identities of place, and environmental attitudes and behaviors of an agricultural city in west-central Minnesota. This project utilized a phenomenological approach to ethnography; that is, it will attempt to describe the culture of Willmar, Minnesota through the lenses of place identity and environmental behaviors.

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CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

Background

A widely accepted goal of environmental education is to “enable citizens to act wisely in situations involving environmental quality and to empower people to create a sustainable future” (Measham, 2007, p. 340). Researchers have termed these “acts” as ‘environmentally responsible behaviors’ (Bott, Cantrill, & Myers Jr, 2003; Cheng, Kruger, & Daniels, 2003; Kaiser, 1998; Lee, 2011; Scannell & Gifford, 2010; Vaske & Kobrin, 2001). Specifically, these behaviors are defined as those that “advocate the sustainable or diminished use of natural resources” (Vaske & Kobrin, 2001, p. 16). By better understanding the opportunities and challenges afforded a particular landscape, its culture, recreations, businesses, etc... we have a broader picture of the lives in which these behaviors take place. Thus, depending on the culture, certain ERB’s and education regarding those ERB’s may be more or less applicable and therefore appropriate. In other words, the environmentally responsible behaviors of a population are embedded in its cultural landscape to such an extent that an education aiming at instilling these behaviors should also be rooted in its local cultural landscape.

Fields such as geography, psychology, architecture, and consumerism science have interest in the dimensions of an environment’s impact on humans. To the extent to which there’s been the nature versus nature debate in the biological sciences, there has been the debate on the origin of culture in human geography; they debate whether culture arises out of its natural environment, elsewhere or both (Vayda & Rappaport, 1968). For example, initial mapping of North America had boundaries delineated by cultural practices, not political lines, with physiographic structures serving as guides for

these cultural boundaries dividing the first nations. The environment's impact on culture has pervaded education too. Educational branches such as environmental education and place-based education have incorporated this discussion into the modern classroom. This movement has been catalyzed by a shift in educational research that supports learning as a full-body experience (Smith, 2005). Historically, educators were confined to thinking that by simply giving the population more information about a subject (for environmental educators, more information about our natural world), we would see a shift in the learners' attitudes and behaviors. Now educators teach to the entire learner through hands on activities, action projects, and in the case of place-based education, interacting with one's local community and environment.

This research will help discern appropriate environmental education for one such cultural landscape. By focusing on the agriculturally-based region of Minnesota, this research will seek to illuminate the phenomena of environmental attitudes and behaviors as they are rooted in a specific cultural landscape. The remainder of this chapter will discuss how my personal history supports this research, outline my research purpose statement, and define terms important to this study.

Personal History. A town with the size and location conducive to the new term 'urban rural', Willmar, Minnesota is located 90 miles west of the Twin Cities with a population of 19,610. It is the largest town for at least 60 miles, serving as the county seat and regional epicenter. I have roots in this parried landscape. Not only have I grown up in Willmar, but my parents grew up in rural South Dakota. Both my parents were born and raised in DeSmet, SD. Though it is a town with a much smaller population than Willmar's (population 1,082), it too is the county seat and has been made famous by the

life and writings of Laura Ingalls Wilder in “The Little Town on the Prairie.” All four of my grandparents also grew up in or around DeSmet, and chose to or simply stayed in DeSmet to raise their families. For all, there is a deep connection to this place. It has not only been where they’ve lived, but where they have dedicated their lives and service. My paternal grandfather served as the town’s physician for the town for 40 years. My maternal grandfather working a variety of jobs from owner of the Standard Oil station, to postman, all while also serving as a volunteer firefighter. To have not only been raised in this landscape myself, but to also come from a rich history of it in my family makes this environment of lifelong import and influence for me.

The connection between the rural landscape and environmental education came later in my life. It was acutely felt while working post-college graduation near my hometown and has, in the three years since, persisted in my observations and experiences.

In 2010 I worked with a program for high-school aged youth with the mission: “to empower youth to partner with their communities to create economic and environmental vitality through hands-on learning and team-based projects” (Youth Energy Summit (YES!), 2014). As one of the program’s coordinators, my job was to help these students carry out their environmental projects across the southwest and, eventually the southeast, part of Minnesota. We worked with local community partners, businesses, and a similar youth program in the metro area. After witnessing the variation in projects communities chose, I began to realize that while the degradation of our environment affects our global population, the solutions to preventing its continued degradation are not and cannot be the same for everyone.

When I think about those community differences, there is one student project that stands out. A particular school group wanted to implement school-wide composting. I helped them set up a tour of the St. Paul Public schools that had been successfully running a composting program for a few years. Their program utilized specialized trucks and a partnership with nearby hog farms to collect food waste from the schools, ‘cook’ the food in the trucks, and feed the hogs with the food waste. However, my student group from a small, rural town could take very little away from this urban program. The trucks were too expensive, and while their school is surrounded by hog farms, there are no farms certified to feed compost nearby (only 17 such farms in the state). Many farmers were choosing to not seek certification because they need to carefully regulate the diet of their hogs. Our students devised a different solution - welding their own trailer hitch to haul their school’s waste to a nearby farm where they monitored the waste, rotated it, and balanced with appropriate amounts of ‘browns’. The farmer could then spread this compost on his field. It was definitely labor intensive, but for the challenges and opportunities for this rural town it was an appropriate solution.

I have seen environmental education approached as a one-size-fits-all. As evidenced in examples such the rural composting program, environmental education as it is more universally being taught has fallen on deaf ears in many rural communities. When environmental education is focused on wilderness, recreation-based landscapes, the education for everyday environmentalism is missing the mark in these agricultural-based communities. It’s thought that because it is a global problem impacting the global population, the solution will have to be equally as universal. However, for real behavior

change, the culture in which we hope to see this will have to be appreciated for its complexity; it will require equally as diverse and complex solutions.

Willmar, Minnesota. Willmar is located in Kandiyohi County. With 78 registered lakes, it is appropriate that the county motto is, “Where the Lakes Begin”. Conversely, the motto could also be ‘where the lakes end’, as Kandiyohi county lies on the border of two biomes - between the prairie south and the forested north (see fig. 1). This change in landscape allows for a unique confluence of the amenity-based landscape of ‘northern Minnesota’ and the agriculturally-based region of southwestern Minnesota.



Figure 1. Map of Minnesota’s biomes. Kandiyohi county highlighted.

Furthermore, Willmar’s recent history of immigration offers a unique variable to this research setting. The challenges and opportunities afforded this location are compounded by the recent arrival of immigrants from Mexico and countries of East Africa. While this research will not specifically focus on these populations, the cultural landscape of Willmar would be incomplete without addressing its location and recent wave of immigration.

Purpose Statement

Not enough is known about how rural culture informs environmentally responsible behaviors, and there is particular gap in inquiry about agricultural communities, a setting that exhibits culture and identity distinct from large cities, wilderness areas, or suburban America. This study focuses on the culture, identities of place, and environmental attitudes and behaviors of an agricultural city in west-central

Minnesota. This project will utilize a phenomenological approach to ethnography; that is, it will attempt to describe the culture of Willmar, Minnesota through the lenses of place identity and environmental behaviors.

Research Objectives

The purpose of this research will be met by asking questions that pertain to the following research questions:

- What social ties or people bond you to this place?
- What natural features and outdoor activities do you enjoy most in this place?
- What cultural experiences, knowledge, or history makes people belong to this place?
- What environmental opportunities and challenges unique to this place?

Definition of Terms

As a part of this research, I will use terms distinguished by the fields of environmental education, human geography, and place-based education. Terms important to the understanding and meaning of this research are defined in detail below and some are further discussed in Chapter 2.

Place Identity. From the broader study of place attachment, stems the more specified place identity. Gross & Brown (2006) broke place attachment into two components: “place identity, which is a symbolic or affective attachment to a place, and place dependence, which is related to the functionality of a place for a recreational activity” (as cited in Hung Lee, 2011). Additional authors have broadened this definition to also include place affect, social bonding, and many additional terms (Scannell & Gifford, 2010).

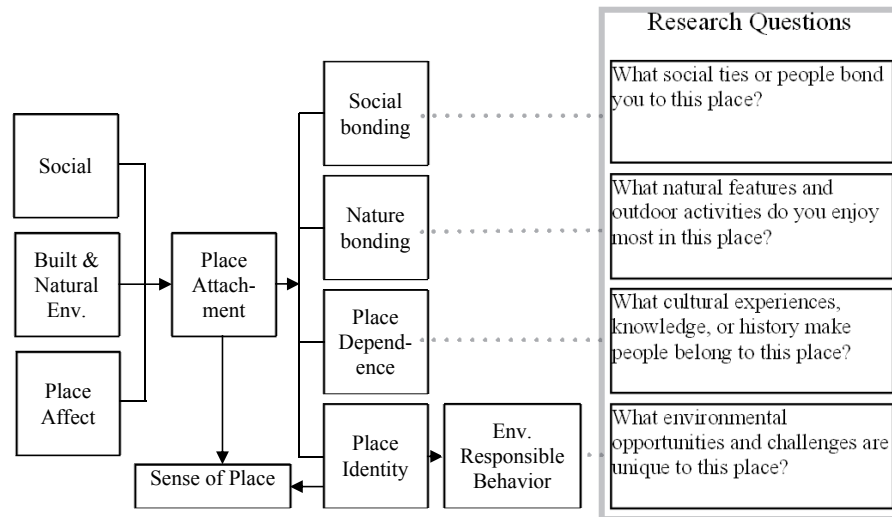


Figure 2. Adds to the determinants, facets, and consequences of place terms: Place Attachment; Place Identity; and Sense of Place. This study's research questions correspond with these resulting bonds of place attachment.

It is important to acknowledge this wide variety of terms without attempting to use all in this study. However, the number of studies between such diverse fields of study, make it difficult to pinpoint one appropriate term, let alone definition. Place identity is related to place attachment in some studies, while place attachment contributes to a sense of place in another (Vaske & Kobrin, 2001; Ramkissoon, 2012; Stedman, 2003; Stedman 2002). I attempted to consolidate the variety of definitions given by previous studies. However, the disparate and incongruous nature of these terms made this nearly impossible. Instead, this research will acknowledge that this is a topic that has been studied to such a depth that it is too nuanced for this study. This research will appropriate a broad definition. In this study, place-attached persons are those who identify with Willmar or the agricultural landscape dominant in the Great Plains of the United States. This theme is discussed further in Chapter 2 of this paper.

Environmentally Responsible Behavior (ERB). On an individual level, environmentally responsible behavior (ERB), or pro-environmental behaviors, describes the actions of someone who advocates sustainable or diminished use of natural resources (Vaske & Kobrin, 2001). There are many scholarly accepted categories of ERB in which specific, measurable behaviors lie. For example, Hungerford et al. listed four categories in their research: persuasion, consumerism, political action, legal action and eco-management (Hungerford, Peyton, and Wilke, 1980). Stern suggests an dividing these actions into public and private categories. Public environmental activism, non-activist behaviors in the public-sphere and private-sphere environmentalism (Stern, 2000). Smith-Sebasto used very global categories: civic action, educational action, financial action, legal action, physical action and persuasive action “that may pertain to any aspect of environmental behavior” (Smith-Sebasto & D’Costa, 1995). Vaske and Kobrin, however, did not use categories, but rather had four general actions (learning how to solve environmental problems, talking with others about environmental issues, talking with parents about environmental issues and trying to convince friends to act responsibly) and four specific actions (joining community cleanup efforts, sorting recyclable materials out of the trash and conserving water by turning off the tap while washing dishes) to measure ERB (2001). This research will use the broad understanding of ERB’s as behaviors that “advocate the sustainable or diminished use of natural resources” (Vaske & Kobrin, 2001, p. 70).

Rural Landscape. This research uses a definition of rural similar to that of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) (discussed further in Chapter 2). In this study the definition of rural lies in the culture of independence and self-reliance

typical to smaller, more remote communities. Ostensibly the USDA bases their definitions of rural against a variety of urban categories. This research will provide demographics that support these various definitions, but will restrict the rural area studied to that of Willmar, Minnesota, its surrounding towns and residential lakes.

Limitations, Delimitations, and Assumptions

This research is not intended to be used as a generalizable description of environmental attitudes and behaviors in all rural landscapes. Instead the strength of this ethnographic research resides its depth of description rather than breadth of application. This research will seek to serve as an accurate and in-depth snapshot of modern-day rural environmental attitudes and behaviors of the West-Central Minnesota region. Data gathered in this study will not seek to describe the entirety of attitudes and behaviors of all rural places. Nor will it compare to other landscapes.

Furthermore, as an inhabitant of the area, this research will acknowledge my personal background and influences. As an ethnographic study, this will add depth of appreciation and knowledge about the culture. However, there is also an added vulnerability of bias towards this research's findings.

Significance

By studying *how* one's environment impacts us, through the study of place identity, we can better understand how we impact it. To ignore the reciprocity of the human-nature relationship would not only be naive, but would exclude a powerful voice in environmental conservation efforts. Measham (2007) states that we are a part of the environment through our sense of place and, to be better stewards [i.e. exhibit environmentally responsible behaviors], we need to recognize humans as a part of the

environment. Dansereau (1975) furthers this thesis this by writing that humans, and their corresponding psycho-social forces can serve as ‘levers’ in the ecosystem. Humans are not simple, predictable ‘animals’. Rather the actions they take - for or against particular ends - have many influencers. Putting the environment on the human stage forces us to understand, or at least explore that complexity. Conserving our natural environment is not only difficult because it is such a complex system, but because it is also operating in a complex system.

Studies have already begun to illustrate this complexity by researching the differences in place meanings and their impacts on conservation and environmental management, with different meanings producing different expectations of appropriate behavior assigned to a place (Cheng, Kruger, & Daniels, 2003). Studies such as this have a variety of implications for application. For example, land managers are interested in studying place attachment so they can be more effective in their messaging, focusing on actions the population would be more prone to taking because they care about the particular aspect of their environment. Furthermore, the tourism industry can profit from certain place meanings (i.e. ecotourism) to promote a place while conserving its novel environment (Lewicka, 2011).

Lastly, this place meaning has impacts on the management of our environments. If it is always one population with a place attachment to a particular landscape making decisions for other populations with attachments different landscapes, then we are failing to meet the diversity of our environmental problems with equally diverse solutions. Dansereau (1975) commented on this in 1975, saying that its from the urban worldview that a multitude of landscapes are managed. This is further evidenced in our

education system, as discussed later in Chapter 2, and the education of environments not local to the learner.

Summary

Better knowing the cultural landscape through the lens of place identity and environmental behaviors will inform educative topics favorable for that culture. This research aims to continue the discourse in this regard.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Place-based environmentalism incorporates three themes that have already independently been studied. These themes are: place and its meaning; the rural landscape; and connection of place identity to environmentally responsible behaviors. The following chapter will explore each of these themes using the existing literature, highlighting similar studies as well as gaps where further study is needed. Additional sub themes are addressed that specifically address place-based education and ties to environmental education. While many studies have analyzed the overlap of two of these three themes, little to no research has been identified that maps all three themes into one study. The intersection of these three themes is what this research seeks to describe (see Purpose in Chapter 1).

Place

These definitions have long been studied by human geographers who often broaden the place definition to landscapes. This research will use this more broad definition in its discussion of the ‘rural’ landscape (discussed later in this chapter). First, however, this chapter will explore the historical research of place, its meaning, and impact on humans. Starting with a general understanding of place, this section will focus on impacts of places on humans through place attachment, and then more specifically place identity, finally discussing the application of place to education through Place-Based Education.

“Places” can be defined as geographical areas interpreted through the presence or absence of human experiences, and impacted to various degrees by the presence or absence of human behavior. The unique characteristics of a geographical area can be

enough to define a 'place'. For example, a place can be defined because it exists apart from human activity as an other i.e. places we understand as wilderness wildlife refuges, or remote rainforests. Conversely, a place can be defined by the existence of a particular population of people i.e. a city, state, or even neighborhood.

In our modern societies, more nuanced theories have evolved, expanding from two to three spheres of study. Cheng et al. defines place as the confluence of its: biophysical attributes and processes; social and political processes; and, social and cultural meanings (Cheng, Kruger, & Daniels, 2003). Regardless of the level of human activity, a place is a place because humans have ascribed meaning to it.

Thomas Measham studied this 'meaning-based perspective' and illustrated that the value of place is not elsewhere or apart from people (Measham, 2007). He found that unless a place has a value - whether through previous experiences, meanings, or even monetary value - it cannot be considered a place. Like J. B. Jackson said in 1984, "a landscape is where we speed up or retard or divert the cosmic program and impose our own" (Riley, 1992, p. 16). The landscape, or place, has meaning because of the relationship humans have with it. "We make places make meanings for us - we imbue them that way - yet some places we acknowledge to be already imbued with significance, and to many others, of course, we assign no significance at all" (Krauth, 2003, para. 8).

The inverse of this human-nature relationship has also been studied i.e. how humans are impacted by their environment. In fact researchers have begun to ask if humans can even have meaning or a personal identity apart from place. The field of phenomenological geography states that it is "impossible to isolate human experience

from place” (Riley, 1992, p. 16). Environmental determinism is a theory that takes this line of reasoning to the extreme by stating that a landscape informs culture, which in turn informs the personalities of the people in that culture (Riley, 1992). While not widely accepted this theory has some validity with human geographers who point to the earlier cultures that depended directly on the natural environment. Vayda and Rappaport reiterate this type of relationship as determinism, where “environmental forms dictate cultural ones and therefore cultural phenomena can be explained and should be predictable to a large extent by reference to their contemporary environments,” (1968, p. 68). This theory opposes the theory of ‘possibilism’, which says that a culture has certain potentials (and detriments) because of its natural environment (Vayda & Rappaport, 1968).

As the number of theories and definitions indicate, the human-nature relationship is complex. And is a topic that becomes only more complex the more it is studied. However despite (and perhaps because of) the difficulty in addressing such disparate theories, this relationship continues to intrigue researchers, which warrants its further study. Researchers agree that the landscape’s impact on us has significant implications for how we, as humans, impact it. These consequences have meant that beyond human geographers, this field of study has become an interest to experts in tourism, resource management and, conservation.

Recent studies in natural resource management have benefited from consumer research in its success on human behavior. Consumer studies have concluded that we buy things for many reasons including the meaning associated with things (Williams, 2014). When applied to natural resource management, we see that besides places

offering certain experiences, places can also offer particular meanings. Adding this ‘meaning-based perspective’ to natural resource management allows conservationists to promote more wide-spread pro-environmental behaviors for places people don’t necessarily experience, but to which they ascribe meaning.

Sense of Place (SOP). Because of the ambiguity and variety of theories, interests, and fields of study, place, as a research paradigm, has been broken down into more specific lenses. This literature review seeks to capture only three of these lenses. It starts with the study of sense of place, a general scope of how a landscape is understood by its inhabitants, or visitors (i.e. what makes this place unique). From a Sense of Place (SOP), researchers have further broken it down to more anthropomorphic-focused understandings of landscapes. Place Attachment and Place Identity are two such constructs that seek to understand how humans are impacted by place or sense of place. These two fields are discussed later in this section.

Hummon (1992) defined SOP through its three dimensions: place identity and community life (the built and social environments); community attachment (which has both emotional and social components); ‘community satisfaction’ (how the built environment is perceived). This differs slightly from Stedman’s (2003) definition that had only two dimensions: place attachment and place satisfaction. Similarly, Cantrill (2011) used two dimensions, but they differ from Stedman’s. Instead, Cantrill distinguished between the sense of place people have to “particular geographic venues” versus an environmental self, that people have to “general landscapes.” A sense of place generated from experiences of others’, or media-generated imagery etc., he argues, make

up one's environmental self. Whereas the true sense of place is considered only when an individual knows and understands, deeply, a particular 'geographic venue.'

These studies, while defining SOP through different dimensions, all confirm that a strong sense of place yields community (or place) attachment discussed in the next section (Hummon, 1992). They agree that for this reason it is important to better understand what promotes a strong SOP and therefore place attachment. Additional authors have studied the consequences of SOP and confirm its importance. David Orr cautions that, "[...] the lack of a sense of place, our 'cult of homelessness', is endemic, and its price is the destruction of the small community, and the resulting social and ecological degeneracy" (Orr, 1992, p. 131).

It is evident in these authors' writings that the study of place must consist of the deep-felt, long-lasting experiences with an environment. These are not the associations of a weekend trip to the north, nor the idyllic week of skiing out west, rather the associations bred in a life spent in the local, everyday landscape. To this extent, we must study the human-place interaction and not just the place itself.

How humans are impacted by their environment is the primary objective of place attachment and place identity studies (discussed below). These fields state that our integration with our environment has implications not only for the worldview we hold, and the aspects of nature we value, but also affects the depth of action we are willing to take on behalf of that environment.

Place Attachment. Place attachment is yet another lens through which researchers have studied place. This study delves deeper into the effect place has on the personhood of its inhabitants. Lewicka (2011) argues that even though place attachment

has been studied for over 40 years, we still don't have a unified idea of the theory of place attachment, there have been too many theoretical perspectives.

In his book "Place and Placelessness", renowned geographer Edward Relph (1976) defines place attachment as "a familiarity that is part of knowing and being known here, in this particular place," (p. 37). He goes on to say that attachment is part of our 'roots' which is even more than this knowledge, but also "a deep sense of care and concern for that place" (Relph, 1976, p.37). Attachment is the affective relationship between people and landscape that goes beyond cognition, preference or judgement (Riley, 1992). It measures the emotional intensity of bonds; whereas 'place meaning' is the psychological role, or the function and processes of relationships to place (Manzo & Devine-Wright, 2014). There is little distinction in the literature regarding the dimensions (i.e. facets), determinants, or consequences of place attachment making the definition thereof extremely diverse.

Researchers have started with the level of place attachment. Since we've already established its presence, the next step was to decipher how strong its presence is. Not surprisingly, researchers have found that there is a gradient to levels of attachment. Just by visiting a place, we are not very attached to it and thus fall on the 'low' end of the spectrum. However, as we spend time and accumulate experiences in and memories of a place, we advance through the gradient of attachment. This gradient was described by one researcher as ranging from 'existential outsidership' to 'existential insidership', with 'Outside' and 'inside' being terms to describe how embedded an individual is in a place (Relph, 1976). Human geographer, Yi-fu Tuan gives the example of an 'outsider' by writing, "the camera is indispensable to the tourist, [...] A snapshot failed to register is

lamented as though the lake itself has been deprived of existence. Such brushes with nature clearly fall short of the authentic” (Tuan, 1974, p. 95). Instead, those who are truly attached to place, or inhabitants as Relph calls them, “bear the mark of their places, whether rural or urban, in patterns of speech, through dress and behavior” (Orr, 1992, p. 130). Relph’s views differ from those of David Orr. While Relph argues that short-term residents cannot exhibit true attachment to a place, Orr writes that there are both long-term and short-term ‘existential insiders’. He maintains that both types of ‘insiders’ can have an attachment to a place insofar as they are willing to value the place (Wattchow & Brown, 2011).

Unsure about the causes of varying levels of attachment, researchers began to explore the facets of attachment, i.e. to what are people attaching. Brehm et al. studied what people attached to insofar as they were concerned with its protection. They found that people may exhibit community (place) attachments to either the natural or social features of an area. Depending on the type of attachment (natural or social), participants concerned themselves with different issues. With a ‘natural’ connection they tended towards resource protection and conservation issues, whereas with ‘social’ connections, they valued more the culture & identity and health of their community (Brehm, Eisenhoaur, & Koranic, 2006). Instead of studying natural and social facets of place attachment, sociologist David Hummon identified two different dimensions of place attachment, place identity and community. That is, the emotional and social attachments to place, and community satisfaction (Hummon, 1992). Hummon found that community satisfaction is comprised of three factors: ecological, social and, economic. He further

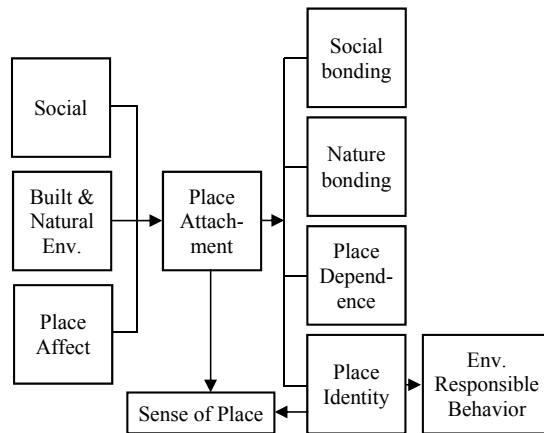


Figure 3. This figure depicts the connection between various determinants, facets, and consequences of place terms: Place Attachment; Place Identity; and Sense of Place. The depicted relationships are my combination of writings of the following publications: Scanell & Gifford, 2010; Raymond et al., 2009; Ramkissoon et al., 2012; Orr, 1996; Hummon, 1992; Brehm, 2006; Stedman, 2002; Cantrill, 2011; Vaske & Kobrin, 2001.

determined that community satisfaction is most dependent on the ‘ecological factor’

(Hummon, 1992).

There is crossover in the facets studied by both Brehm and Hummon, and the four dimensions defined by Ramkissoon et al. Their studies looked at four dimensions of place attachment; place dependence, place affect, place social bonding, and place identity. Based on the dimensions studied by a researcher, certain determinants and eventually consequences of place attachment could be explained. One of the facets discussed above, place identity, will be further explored this section. First, this section will explore the determinants of place attachment, the final vein of research the field of place attachment studies has explored.

Unlike the strength of place attachment or the dimensions that define it, the determinants of place attachment are studied for their usefulness in understanding how to manipulate or manage attachment to a place. Determinants are the independent

variables measured for their strength in relation to one's attachment. For example, length of residence, as compared to other variables of population size, density, social class and stage in life-cycle, was found in impact community attachment most strongly (Kasarda & Janowitz, 1974). There has even been research into specific features of natural environments that promote attachment. More studied by architects and city planners for their impact on residential draw, this concept has found that "certain landscape attributes are associated with attachments to the landscape," (Brehm, Eisenhoaur, & Koranic, 2006). In his book, "Topophilia: a study of environmental perception, attitudes, and values", Tuan (1974) details four landscapes of universal appeal to all humans; the 'cabin in the woods', the seashore, the valley, and the island.

These determinants of place attachment, specifically attachment to the natural world, is an important consideration for professionals aiming to use sense of place, or promote a sense of place as a means of promoting conservation. Particularly, as Orr points out, because "we are not likely to have the stamina to do the utilitarian things necessary for the long haul if that effort is not resonant with what is deepest in us [...]" (1996, p. 232). In this study, it is important to be aware of the absence or presence of existing determinants in the subject area as a means of informing the level of place attachment residents' experience (see 'Rural' section below).

Place Identity. Place Identity is one dimension of place attachment as discussed above. This facet fine-tunes the otherwise broadly used construct of 'place' and focuses specifically on the aspect of which most influences its residents. Because of its focus on a place's impact on humans, the study of place identity has often fallen under the umbrella of psychology. Place identity is akin to self-identity, defined as the cognitive

strategy for connecting people to place (Cheng, Kruger, & Daniels, 2003). By very definition, place identity implies that places have an inherent value and, “that the connections people have with natural resources extend far beyond use” (Cheng, Kruger, & Daniels, 2003, p. 93). Because of their similarities, many researchers have had difficulty distinguishing place attachment from place identity. Wattchow & Brown (2011) maintain that place attachment goes hand-in-hand with place identity, that “a crucial aspect of understanding how humans develop levels of attachment to places has to do with identity” (p. 66).

Similar to place attachment, place identity falls onto a gradient of ‘insideness’ to ‘outsideness’. Brown and Wattchow expand on the idea of insideness versus outsideness introduced by Relph in his discussion of place attachment. To measure one’s insideness and in turn place identity, Brown and Wattchow use the depth of experiences or length of inhabitation (2011). An ‘empathetic insider’, they write, means, “to understand that places are rich in meaning, and hence to identify with it for these meanings [...they] stem from one’s own experiences (Wattchow & Brown, 2011, p. 62).

Place-Based-Education (PBE)

The importance of place has many implications. The lack of both a sense of place and place attachment, and thus a loss of place identity, has profound negative impacts on individuals. Relph again cautions that, “the person who has no place with which he identifies is in effect, homeless, without roots” (Relph, 1976, p. 55). The opposite of this placelessness, i.e. knowing a place, gives people roots. To know a place, David Orr (1992) writes, “is the art of living well where we are” (p. 130). He adds, “good inhabitation is an art requiring detailed knowledge of place, the capacity for

observation, and a sense of care & rootedness” (Orr, 1992, p. 130). The challenge, then, is promoting learning and knowing about a place.

Acknowledging learning as a full-bodied experience imbedded in a culture is the premise for place-based education, “a progressive form of education in which students use their own communities as the source of issues to investigate the location for learning, and, indeed, as an important motivation for learning” (Howley, Howley, Camper, & Perko, 2011, p. 217). Place-based education “usually includes conventional outdoor education methodologies as advocated by John Dewey to help students connect with their particular corners of the world” (Woodhouse & Knapp, 2000, p. 2). Acquiring a ‘detailed knowledge of a place’ has been lost in a standardized education system and its resurgence has been the goal of Place-Based Education. John Dewey was the first to propose place as an educational tool in his 1897 essay, “My Pedagogic Creed” (Dewey, 1897). Place-based education (PBE) has since been extensively studied by David Sobel, who has had success in establishing the value of PBE in both environmental education (EE) and the formal classroom (2004). Using PBE, students have the opportunity to learn in authentic way, connect their education to the students’ prior lived experiences, create connections between schools and the local community, and actively engage in their learning (Sarkar & Frazier, 2008; Smith, 2002; Sobel, 2004). Most commonly, PBE has been implemented and studied in relatively small school systems, in rural and/or indigenous communities (Brehm, 2006; Vaske & Kobrin, 2001; Howley, 2011).

Dewey was looking at the formal educational system with his main audience being our youth. However, by default of including place in the educational system, the audience becomes the greater community. As Orr (1992) points out, “learning doesn’t

stop at the point of mere intellectual comprehension” (p. 129). While education looks different for different ages, it is just as important to include the adults in learning about their place as it is to include the youth.

There are many barriers to implementing place-based education. Besides the standardization of our education system, and the wide-range of ages needing place-based education, there are additional hurdles that must be overcome. Orr highlights the following three barriers: place is too nebulous to study, and there are too many places to interpret; place is too abstract; and, we tend to overlook the “immediate and mundane,” because those things, he writes, “that are nearest at hand are often the most difficult to see” (Orr, 1992, p. 126). This trend is prevalent in environmental education where we often encourage exploration of places that are ‘wild’ and removed from the human influence rather than the landscapes humans live in. Instead, Measham (2007) states that, “to be better stewards [i.e. exhibit environmentally responsible behaviors], we need to recognize humans as a part of the environment,” (p. 340).

Promoting this connection to place not only promotes inhabitation and a sense of place, but also promotes pro-environmental behaviors, noted earlier as one of the major goals of EE. James Cantrill studied the factors professionals should consider when enlisting local citizens in pro-environmental efforts, and he identified assessing citizens’ senses of ‘self-in-place’ as a priority (2011). Other studies have confirmed that how people use the land, or are attached to the landscape influences their reactions to changes to the place. Most conflicts over conservation issues occur over land use. These differences, “emerge over meanings, and therefore expectations of appropriate behavior” as assigned to a place, (Cheng, Kruger, & Daniels, 2003, p. 91). Researchers Kobrin and

Vaske (2001) studied the effect of PBE on environmental education by measuring the change in the learners' environmental responsible behaviors. The study looked both at the emotional attachment people develop with their environment, and the functional attachment (how people use their surroundings). In their findings, Kobrin and Vaske (2001) saw that the greater a population's emotional attachment with their community, the greater both their functional attachment and their level of environmentally responsible behavior. The functionality of a landscape can span a great many uses, ranging from using the land as a source of income (as is the case in mining communities of northern Minnesota, and agriculture communities of southwestern Minnesota), to recreational uses. Therefore understanding the type of functionality is presumably important in understanding the resulting behaviors.

On a much smaller scope, Lianne Fisman studied the variance in this 'functionality' between neighborhoods. In *The Effects of Local Learning on Environmental Awareness in Children*, Fisman found that the differences in students' home environments influenced the students' ability to adapt the 'local learning' (or PBE) students had in school to their home life (Fisman, 2005). She used the location of the students' homes as a proxy for socioeconomic status (SES), identifying specific neighborhoods as either low, or high SES. Students with positive home environments, in higher SES neighborhoods, were better able to transfer what they learned in school to their home environments. Students who were cautious about their home environment (lower SES neighborhoods) were not able as easily able to transfer what they learned in school to home (Fisman, 2005). Even at the level of the home, researchers have found that we are impacted by our environment, whether they be built or natural environments.

We can now begin to study how place influences us. Knowing how, we can deliver education that not only captures the attention of the learner, but also encourages lifelong environmentally responsible behavior.

Environmental education offers a logical connection to place-based education. While there is considerable overlap in theory, there has not been as much overlap in practice. Arguably the goal of environmental education is to connect people to place by fostering the ‘knowledge, attitudes and behaviors’ necessary to conserve our natural environments. The two fields can merge to successfully fill this gap by encouraging a connection to place through knowledge about the place. Many researchers have studied this overlap. Measham pointed to a study that differentiated between eight themes to community attachment, three of which tie to environmental education: experiential learning is crucial during key phases of our development; family (elders) are key educators; and information focusing on local, natural disasters is influential on adult learners (Measham, 2007).

Unfortunately, environmental education has fallen victim to similar influences as that of formal education curriculum. Environmental education as it is currently practiced doesn’t allow for connections between individual, place and community of practice [(Brown, 2009) as cited in (Wattchow & Brown, 2011)]. For example, they write that we force participants to verbalize the experience, acutely separating the learner from the context in which a skill, behavior, or attribute was practiced. Education about the Amazon Rainforest takes precedence over education of the prairie in our backyard. However, environmental (experiential, or outdoor) education is, in theory, placing the learner in the environment or situation being studied. To reorient our focus

to the local landscape “is a vital issue for experiential educators particularly those interested in the possibilities of developing a sense of place,” (Wattchow & Brown, 2011, p. 47). Despite these challenges, the promotion of a sense of place has such significant implications (or rather the lack of a sense of place as such dire consequences) that it is too important to overlook. These ramifications are even greater in the rural, small town.

Historically, the rural, small town character has been compromised for the standards set by the urban, city centers particularly in formal education. This standardization has required ignoring the place in which and about which it takes place. Modern curriculum has been shaped by the “belief that knowledge could be standardized and mass produced regardless of differences in regional ecology and culture,” (Orr, 1996, p. 231). School consolidations went hand in hand with the effort to make the curriculum of rural school like that of urban schools (Orr, 1996).

Additionally, corporate-sponsored media has succeeded in not only overpowering the local business, but also “contributing to the educational and economic narratives that keep the attention of educators and learners focused away from their own communities,” (Gruenewald & Smith, 2008). To counter this trend, Wes Jackson, founder of The Land Institute, we need an “education that equips people to ‘become native to a place’, as he put it, will require a curriculum shaped in part by the particularities of location, bioregion, and culture.” (Orr, 1996). Orr (1996) adds, “re-ruralization [...] will require a curriculum that honors tradition, locality, rootedness, ecological competence, and the attributes that hold people and land together in harmony” (p. 231). This place-based education is founded not in education about the

natural world in general, but an understanding of the everyday landscape in which people live. “The challenge is to experience ecological identity everywhere, not just in specific places [...] but in various domains of everyday life” (Wattchow & Brown, 2011, p. 181). For me as the researcher and the participants interviewed, the agricultural-based landscape of the prairie is my everyday life, and is for this reason why I chose to focus on the rural landscape.

Landscape

By positioning place in a larger context, we begin to include another geographical term, landscape. To most people, landscape generally means a picture of a natural setting or what one sees when you pull to the side of the road for a scenic overlook. Landscape has taken its own meaning among geographers, anthropologists, and even ecologists. Here, landscape intertwines the nonhuman natural world with the culture of its inhabitants. Landscape therefore refers to a much more involved understanding of a place being more than the sum of its parts. Instead, humans are recognized as influencing and being influenced by their natural world, and it is the ongoing interplay between the two that is their landscape (Wylie, 2007). By exploring this rich, nuanced term we broaden our understanding of place.

Early students of landscape took a Cartesian approach to landscape, dividing landscape into its culture and its natural features. More modern understanding of landscape, however, would not have us think of it in terms of this duality. Rather, landscape is the “practices, habits, actions, and events, ongoing processes of relating and un-relating, it is the origin of our ideas on nature and culture” (Wylie, 2007, p. 11). If we continue with the antiquated definition of landscape we continue to allow this separation

between culture and nature, humans and nonhuman elements. This allows places driven by humans, typically areas of production or industrious landscapes, to be disregarded as non-environmental. We then lose the potentiality of these places, their people and their habitats. Instead, defining our environment as landscapes of human and nonhuman together, we allow for the ‘everyday’ environs to mean as much environmentally as they do culturally. The lived-in landscape is woven into the natural world, just as humans and nature are knitted together in landscape. This research is after the ‘vernacular’ or everyday landscape that J.B. Jackson studied when he acknowledged natural influencers everywhere and not just in the remote, pristine wilderness (Wylie, 2007).

Rural Landscape. What is ‘rural’? For many in the state of Minnesota, it could be considered simply all that is ‘outstate’, or places that are outside of the Twin Cities metro region. The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), Economic Research Service put out a document illustrating the differences of what is ‘rural’ in the state of Minnesota, based on up to nine differentiating definitions. These range in scale from city/township to county. The defining factors also differ in population sizing, or simply the time it would take to commute to a urban area. Most recently considered in rural definitions, are those areas of ‘small-town urban’. The U.S. Census Bureau defines rural by saying simply it, “encompasses all population, housing, and territory not included within an urban area” (Geography, 2014, para. 3). Depending, then on how urban is defined, there are many definitions of rural. For example, if urban is defined as an area with a population ‘greater than or equal to 2,500’ then rural areas lie in all the areas with populations less than 2,500.

Our fascination, admiration, and even romanticization of the country life and its rural environs is a deeply held American ideal. From the east to the west, European-American explorers set out to the wilderness. Pushing towards the ever-moving boundary of civilized and wild is how America, still a globally young nation, came to be. As Tuan outlines in *Topophilia* this has not been the mindset globally. Rather the urban lifestyle has shifted from the safe and nurturing insides of a castle wall to representing a contrasting escape from the fast-paced, grimy urban center (Tuan, 1974).

From the early homesteaders to the modern-day farms, the rural landscape has continued to be shaped by the people who call it home. Despite the persona of a frontier nation, this country has had a steady decline in independent farmers matched by a decline in rural population since the 1950's. In 1950 almost half of Americans still lived in rural areas, but as of 1990 less than 1 in 4 (22.9%) lived in rural areas, with 1.9% of whom lived on farms (Orr, 1996). Farming which has traditionally be the main employment of the rural life, is now only 6% of the rural labor force (Winchester, 2012). Minnesota is not an exception. The number of farms has been on the decline, with 80,839 in 2002 to 74,542 in 2012. Another indicator of a depleting population has been the consolidation of schools. The number of Minnesota schools has declined due to consolidation, from 432 in 1990 to 337 in 2010 - a decline of 22% (Winchester, 2012).

This decline is not for want of the rural lifestyle. In his study, Community Attachment: Local Sentiment and Sense of Place, Hummon found that as compared to the residents of an urban center, rural residents reported a higher percentage of community satisfaction. 48% reporting they were "completely satisfied" with their community versus 20% of central city residents (Hummon, 1992).

Agricultural rural areas, unlike those of urban, suburban, or even amenity-based rural areas face a unique set of challenges ranging from those faced since the early days, to more modern, timely issues. Since the Industrial Revolution, there has been a battle of the ‘main street business’ and the corporation. Wendell Berry points this out by writing, “centralized economic entities of our time do not come into rural places in order to improve them by ‘creating jobs’, they come to take as much of the value as they can take, as cheaply and as quickly as they can take it,” (Berry, 1996, p. 77). Since the beginning of the recession in 2007 there has been a marked difference in recovery between rural and urban centers. According to an article issued by the USDA, Economic Research Service, employment rates during this recession were larger in rural areas as compared to urban, and have been slower to grow post-recession (Hertz, Kusmin, Marre, & Parker, 2014).

Minnesota, along with other Great Plains states, have long been focusing on the challenges and opportunities of its rural areas. In a survey conducted by the regional development commission (RDC) of Appleton, MN found that people most often listed five reasons from moving to rural areas: 1) desire for a simpler life, 2) safety and security, 3) affordable housing, 4) outdoor recreation, and 5) those with children cited a need for quality schooling (Winchester, 2012). Another study surveyed newcomers of the West-Central area of Minnesota. They found that 43% of the newcomers lived in or near their city before returning, 30% have a spouse who lived in or near their city before returning. Accounting for 73% of newcomers are returners to the rural area (Winchester, 2012). There is a newer phenomena of “rural urbanity”. These authors cite the cities of Willmar, Marshall, and Mankato (with 2013 populations of 19,680, 13,483, and 40,641

respectively) (Winchester, 2012). These cities all lying in what Winchester et al. referred to as ‘non-recreation counties’ (Winchester, Spanier, & Nash, 2011).

If we are to offer an education that accommodates this landscape we must start with those that know it best. As Orr writes, “any effort to re-ruralize that does not come out of a broad vision of humans, in the landscape will sooner or later fail because it will not hold our loyalty and affections for long,” (Orr, 1996, p. 232-233). Our actions must therefore honor those who live in this landscape, by aligning environmental messaging and initiatives with the culture of this area.

Place Connection to Environmentalism

Misham states that we are a part of the environment through our sense of place. To be better stewards [i.e. exhibit environmentally responsible behaviors], we need to recognize humans as a part of the environment (Measham, 2007). As Aldo Leopold famously wrote in his Sand County Almanac, “When we see land as a community to which we belong, we may begin to use it with love and respect”.

While researchers have long been studying the impact of humans on the environment, we are only just beginning to better understand how it impacts us. Dansereau describes how this impact differs from a rural to urban landscape. He writes, “industrial development are predicated upon functional premises that are bound to relate to the environment in a very different way from rural economies” (1975, p. 197). In the last 40 years of research on this subject, there is still a great deal to be understood regarding the relationship between humans and their environment - both the extent to which it impacts them and they it. Instead, because of ecology’s start in the natural sciences rather than human studies, we know ecological laws better in the uninhabited

wilderness rather than the landscape inhabited by humans (Dansereau, 1975).

Furthermore, we may discover that from this culture, we may find new forms of environmentalism and that perhaps it is with the “people at the margins of industrial society that the foundation for a hopeful and humane future is being laid” (Gruenewald & Smith, 2008). This relationship will need to be better understood, if we are to promote a citizenry that can live in and support its natural world.

A Globalizing World; A Growing Sense of Placelessness. We are more uprooted than ever before. As Udall writes in *A Quiet Crisis*, “We are now a nomadic people, our new-found mobility has deprived us of a sense of belonging to a particular place” (p. 189). And yet as we are positioned in an ever mobile, globalizing world to recognize let alone, know, one’s native ground is becoming a rarity.

In many ways these advances are positive, successful examples of technology bridging otherwise insurmountable distances. In our globalizing society, and the “growing number of the so called non-places, not only have places not lost their meaning but their importance in the contemporary world actually may have grown” (Lewicka, 2011, p. 209). Globalization allows us to be internal visitors to more places than ever before, “the concept of landscape itself might be changing” and how these new landscapes are experienced in today’s ‘globalized’ world is also changing (Riley, 1992). Despite many advantages, there are also many disadvantages to a globalizing world, the impacts of which we are only beginning to recognize.

Wendell Berry was early to caution against the solutions afforded a globalized world. He wrote, “We are not smart enough, or conscious enough, or alert enough, to work responsibly on a gigantic scale” (Orr, 1992, p. 159).

Relph (1976) defines 'placelessness' as both, "an environment without significant places and the underlying attitude which does not acknowledge significance in places" (p. 143). Furthermore, he writes, "placelessness is an attitude, and an expression of that attitude, which is becoming increasingly dominant ... and that it is less possible to have a deeply felt sense of place or to create places authentically" (Relph, 1976, p. 80). Placelessness is a part and product of our modern, present-day landscapes. People, social networks, and homes more mobile than ever, it is only the physical environment that stays (Lewicka, 2011). It's estimated that the 'rate of mobility' is equivalent to each household moving once every three years. Made possible by and reinforcing the reduction in the significance of 'home' (Relph, 1976).

This is a relatively new phenomena. Historically, when populations depended on the land more directly and were less mobile both physically and technologically. In recent history, place has become less important because our places are more easily changed, "traded for a nicer home in a better neighborhood" (Relph, 1976, p. 66). We are compromising the value of being committed to a place, its simplicity and everydayness for the newness of 'elsewhere' and 'other' (Relph, 1976). However, despite the advantages of being a mobile population and the opportunities afforded a globalized world, we, as humans, need to be rooted in the land to thrive. William Vitek describes this need in his essay in *Rooted in the Land*. Here he writes that to be 'rooted in the land' is a "strong notion unapologetic about the sorts of structures necessary both to hold something in place and to nourish it," he continues, "how can we divide the root from the sap, the syrup from the sustenance, the neural impulse from the thought? Human communities too must be rooted in a place and fully connected to the natural

world that surrounds us and that is us,” (Vitek, 1996, p. 2). Orr (1996) suggests that we cannot simply educate ourselves back to rootedness, we need a cultural revolution to, “discover a larger concept of land and ourselves” (p. 233).

The agricultural rural landscape has been left unexamined for its environmental potential rather than degradation. The environmental attitudes and behaviors tied to this rural landscape need to be studied at this time when our environment, global population, and the relationship between the two are changing more than ever. This research allows for this pivotal landscape to be critically considered through an ethnographic study of Willmar, Minnesota.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this ethnographic study is to examine the phenomena of environmental attitudes and behaviors as they emerge in the culture of an agricultural, rural landscape. To explore both phenomena and culture, this study will utilize the phenomenological approach to ethnography, that is, it will seek to interpret the culture of Willmar, Minnesota area through the lens of environmental attitudes and behaviors. More specifically, describing the phenomena of pro-environmental attitudes and behaviors in the culture of the rural landscape of west-central Minnesota.

Strategy of Inquiry

This study will use the phenomenological approach to ethnography. According to Babbie (2011), “ethnography reports on social life that focuses on detailed and accurate description rather than explanation” (p. 324). By its very definition, ethnography seeks to gain close access with the population being studied so to understand the relationships and patterns therein. Anthropologist Tim Ingold states that the objective of ethnography is “to describe the lives of people other than ourselves, with an accuracy and sensitivity honed by detailed observation and prolonged first-hand experience” (Pink & Morgan, 2013, p. 351). This qualitative approach to research allows for unique forms of data collection that depict these stories and describe these cultures. Cheng et al. (2003) write that there are preferred research methods depending on the subject of study. Specifically geared towards natural resource management, they write that ethnographic interviews, observations, surveys and cognitive maps should be used if studying how one’s actions are influenced by various social factors. They also suggest

observation and document analysis if the intent of research is to change the meanings of places to manipulate conservation practices” (Cheng, Kruger, & Daniels, 2003). This research will use some forms of these ethnographic methods including ethnographic interviews, lived experience, and analysis of local documents. Ethnography, like many qualitative research approaches are gaining popularity and validity as a growing number of venues and subject are studied using this method. As such, there is an increasing acceptance for studying fields close to the researcher, an area of study historically thought to be too biased. Instead, a culture close to the researcher is recognized for the insight and added depth such an experience offers the researcher. Such researcher background has the potential to add a complexity and depth of description afforded only a life-long resident of a place. Spencer (2011) points to the fairly recent development of ethnography that includes the cultures close to researchers. Instead of studying populations that are apart from the researcher or foreign to the audience, ethnographers are beginning to study the known populations and environments. It requires a relatively difficult level of scrutiny to discern the important factors from the benign. The, “everyday, taken-for-granted aspects of our culture are particularly difficult to recognize and observe,” (Spencer, 2011, p. 47).

However, due to the complexity of this topic, this research will also use the phenomenological approach in its methods. Phenomenology, as the word implies, is the study of ‘phenomena’. These are the experiences people have that construct their reality. The purpose of phenomenology is to investigate the basis of knowledge and asks how it is possible” (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, p. 22). As such, this field is not concerned with studying what is but rather how they appear (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). In this study,

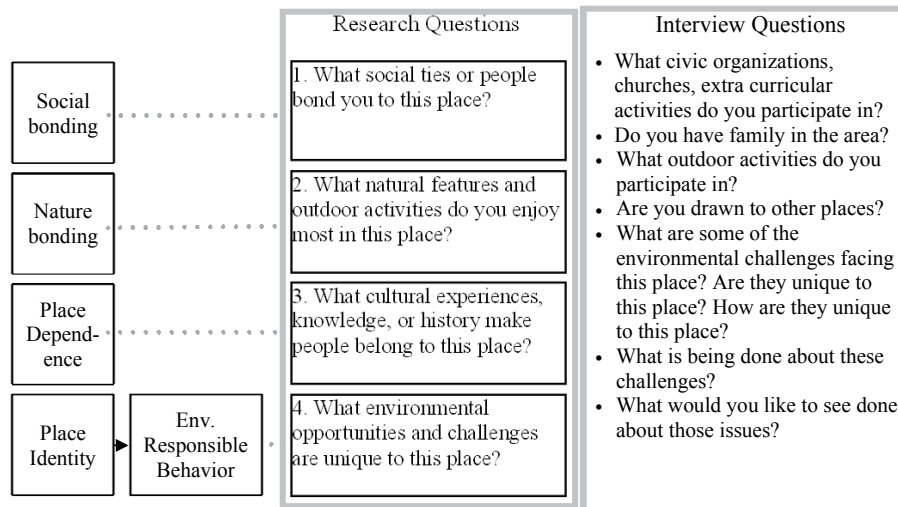


Figure 4. Correlation of interview questions to research questions.

the phenomena are the environmental attitudes and behaviors of participants. It is important in phenomenology to recognize the phenomena as a pre-existing construct. Without this lens the study would describe the shared cultural experience and seek to illuminate the attitudes and behaviors that emerge from that culture. This would be a strictly ethnographic methodology however. In order to appropriately include the phenomenological approach, this study will examine the pre-existing environmental attitudes and behaviors as they are exhibited in the culture that is the Willmar area. As such this research will focus, “a strong emphasis on exploring the nature of a particular social phenomena, rather than setting out to test hypotheses about them” (Atkinson & Hammersley, 1994, p. 248).

Participants

Through purposive sampling, key, environmentally engaged ‘gatekeepers’ of the community were identified and interviewed. It was important to have already identified who has an attachment to the place, so that their pro-environmental attitudes and

behaviors were better understood. Both Relph and Orr have done extensive studies on the qualities of a 'place-attached' person. In his writings, Relph distinguished between the 'insider' and the 'outsider', even providing a scale ranging from existential outsider to existential insider (Relph, 1976). In accordance with this scale, I sought to include only those who are existential and empathetic insiders. Gauldie (1969) describes empathetic insiders as someone who is "prepared to expose himself to the new experience of a place and ask himself what that place is doing to him and how it is doing it" (Relph, 1976).

Additionally, Orr differentiated between a resident and an inhabitant. A resident lives in a place that provides income whereas inhabitants, "bear the mark of their places, whether rural or urban, in patterns of speech, through dress and behavior. Uprooted, they get homesick. [...] make good neighbors and honest citizens. [...] bedrock of a stable community," (Orr, 1992, p. 130). According to Orr's definition, inhabitants, rather than residents, were included in this study.

This well-founded distinction between those who simply are from a place, and those who are a part of the place is important in gathering data that represents the nature of the place and the pro-environmental attitudes and behaviors of that population in particular. To include the 'outsider' or 'resident' would risk influencers not of the place but of another. Relph cautioned against this, writing that the problem with experiencing places as outsiders is that our, "observations are fitted into the ready-made identities that have been provided by mass media or into a priori mental schema, and inconsistencies with these are either ignored or explained away" (Relph, 1976, p. 60). This study seeks

to identify themes in the environmental attitudes and behaviors of its ‘insiders’ such that the themes have emerged from this specific landscape.

This is important for my role too. As I am a native of this area, both living there for several years, and working post-graduate in the area, I, as the researcher, am afforded particular insights discussed next.

Researcher’s Role

To be an insider as the researcher affords particular opportunities that can enrich an ethnographic study. In fact, Relph uses the words of philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche to caution that people “risk being inauthentic when a thinker doesn’t stand in ‘personal relation to his problems’” (Relph, 1976, p. 81). It is therefore important to study a landscape of which I am a part. To be, as the researcher, an ‘insider’, allows for the veil of ambiguity, and the false romanticism to be removed. I can instead ask the same questions the decision-makers and residents ask. To acknowledge the proximity of me as the researcher, an attempt to bracket my experience and relationship with the place was made. Bracketing is a qualitative research method used to suspend personal preconceptions during the research process that would otherwise hinder the research data and process (Tufford & Newman, 2012). Tufford & Newman (2102) also write of a variety of tools researchers use to bracket, including journaling and note-taking. For this research, I have bracketed my personal connection to this place by fully describing my experience in the background section, acknowledging the impact this place has made on me and I on it. There still is a risk of what Babbie (2011) calls the ‘ethnographic fallacy’, where ethnographers can too easily oversimplify and overgeneralize the themes

they identify in their population. To avoid this, data was cross-checked by an additional reader, adding reliability to the resulting analysis of this data.

Data Collection Procedures

Potential interviewees were contacted via e-mail inquiring whether or not they would be willing to participate in this study. Follow-up communication was conducted through e-mail. Interviews took place in-person, at the location of the interviewee's choosing. Interviews were audio recorded. Interviews ranged in length, some lasting only 20 minutes, others lasting a little over one hour. All interviews were audio recorded. Interviews were transcribed onto a password-protected computer. Transcriptions did not include participant names, but rather coded identifiers.

Babbie cautions against the "ethnographic fallacy," overgeneralizing and simplifying the studied population so as to provide labels and boxes of relationships (Babbie, 2011). To prevent against this, chosen participants were reviewed by a non-participant of the area. This person validated that those chosen are representative of people in the area who identify with the place and are recognized as knowing the area's environmental concerns.

Descriptions of particular places or characteristics of the landscape were shared by participants. As a researcher with extensive knowledge of the areas discussed, I photographed some of these places to add to the data. These items enrich the interview and document data by providing a fuller description of the area. While discussions and analyzed data are subject to a researcher's bias, Spencer (2011) argues that the use of technology, through pictures and video, offers a somewhat objective lens with which the researcher can communicate this environment experienced so close to them.

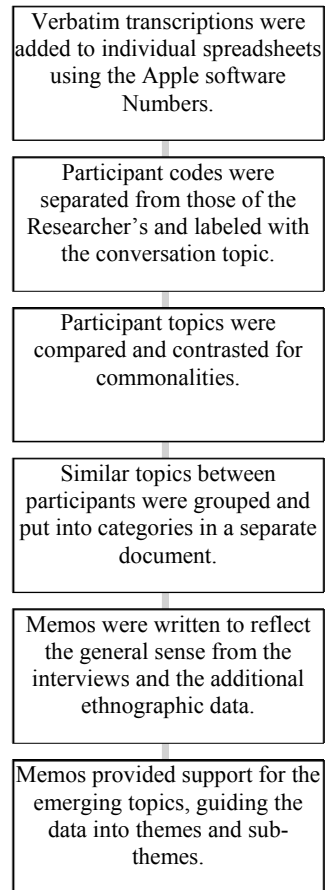


Figure 5. Data Analysis procedure.

This form of visual anthropology is becoming increasingly widespread in the literature of applied anthropology (Pink, 2011). Gubrium and Harper (2009) write, “new visual technologies are changing the ways that anthropologists do research and opening up new possibilities for participatory approaches appealing to diverse audiences” (p. 2). This innovative technology allows the researcher to explore an environment or culture at a new level. Sarah Pink (2007) further describes this by writing, “As a researcher I felt I needed to ‘be there’ to gain and to invoke the complexities implied by an

anthropological use of the phrase - ‘a sense of place’” (p. 240). Photos included in the data followed the interviews and were not shown to participants prior to interviews, rather are strictly meant to serve as a visual reflection of the places and topics the participants discussed.

Data Analysis

All interviews were transcribed using the free Transcriptions© software available through the Apple App Store. Interviews were coded using Numbers© software. Data was validated through numerous readings on the part of the researcher and an additional reader. As a qualitative study, the researcher did not use the quantitative numerical or statistical measurements that are typically used to validate data. Moustakas (1990) states that the validation of this type of data is instead validated through constant checking on the part of the researcher. He further states that the researcher should read and re-read the data until all the “essences and meanings actually portray the phenomenon investigated” (p. 33). Interviews in this methodology should prompt participants to expose the phenomena more fully than it is otherwise observed (Moustakas, 1990).

Prior to coding the interviews, the researcher first ‘memoed’ the transcriptions. The researcher read the transcriptions multiple times and wrote down her reactions to what was said. The resulting ‘memo’ was then compared to those of another reader. This analytical reflective process allows themes to emerge over the commonalities in the memos.

Summary

This study used the above methodology, data collection procedures, and forms of data analysis to further illuminate the phenomena of environmental attitudes and behaviors in the rural, agricultural-based area of Willmar, Minnesota.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

The purpose of this ethnographic study was to examine both the culture of an agricultural, rural landscape and the phenomena of environmental attitudes and behaviors. As described in Chapter 3, this purpose was delineated into four research questions. They are: What social ties or people bond you to this place?; what natural features and outdoor activities do you enjoy most in this place? and; what environmental opportunities and challenges are unique to this place? As evidenced through data analysis, a variety of social influencers (rather than natural) play an especially important role in this area. Whether it is the reason people move to the area and how they describe the place to others or the economics of environmental action and inaction, social factors drive the environmental understanding of this landscape. This chapter will first discuss this place as it was described by participants and through additional sources from the area. Next, this chapter will discuss important environmental issues and actions as they relate to this place. Prompting the final chapter, which will iterate these findings into implications and suggestions for further research.

Familiarity with the Rural Landscape

This first category of place descriptors resulted in particular commonalities between participants. The first of which were the reasons they have moved to the area initially. Most commonly cited were the proximity to family and availability of a job. When discussing family, participants described the location of where they now live relative to their parents, and their spouse's parents. Conveniently, Willmar, Spicer, and New London allowed for participants and their families to live between their respective parents, or at least in relative close proximity. Often, participants' parents still lived in

the same place in which the participants grew up, offering further evidence to research that states that former residents of rural, Midwest areas often settle in similar regions. This familiarity with what they grew up with is also reflected in the outdoor activities participants have continued into adulthood.

Rurality is a Draw and Anchor to This Place. Another factor in the familiarity participants had with the area was the size, or rurality of their town. None of the participants had lived in urban areas in their childhood, but rather many had lived in even smaller towns, or those comparable in size to Willmar. Many participants' descriptions of this area were making comparisons to these hometowns. When asked if this area was rural, all participants pointed to the population and proximity to larger towns. Willmar, while rural, was considered to be a medium-sized town. Smaller communities surrounding Willmar were then described in their ability to be 'stand alone' communities or 'bedroom' communities in regards to Willmar as the regional center. For example, Beth was quick to point out that while she considers New London to be an independent community, she understands that, "the perception is different among a lot of people who perceive New London [...] of being a bedroom suburb" (personal communication, March 6, 2015). Factors such as employment, entertainment, and access to basic needs- such as grocery stores- were listed when determining a town's independence. However, there was not consent on the social culture of the area in that participants' views regarding the vibrancy and variety of social offerings in the area varied widely. This may be in large part due to the fact that participants lived and worked in the bigger city of Willmar, or lived and worked in Willmar's surrounding towns, Spicer, New London, and Kandiyohi (see map below). Participants have also

lived in this area anywhere between two and 54 years, and therefore were able to speak to activities and traditions in the area to varying degrees. For example Fred would have considered Willmar to be a big town early in his life when growing up in the much smaller communities of Orr and Amboy, Minnesota but having since lived in larger



Figure 6. Map of participants' places of residence.

towns, now considers Willmar to be small.

Perhaps just as important calling this place home, are the reasons why people choose to *not* live there. Despite its rural location, few participants chose to live in this area for its natural environment. Rather, Connor says that if he were to choose where to live based on the landscape, it would be in northern Minnesota. As a child, Fred was, “excited to move from southern Minnesota to northern Minnesota” where it was, “so much more scenic”. A feeling that has continued into adulthood for him as he believes that, “environmentally, Northern Minnesota wins, hands down” and that, “people in northern Minnesota are probably more in tune to the environment cause it’s wilderness for the most part up there and that attracts a that sort-of person.” Danielle also compared

this area to that of northern Minnesota when describing her work with students in Future Farmers of America (FFA).

I know of, like, in northern Minnesota, where it's, you know, it's all trees and all that kind of stuff - within Minnesota, northern Minnesota is known for being, like, really good at the wildlife management contest [in FFA], cause that's what they do environmental stuff. [Does the wildlife management contest apply to students here?] It certainly applies, but it's not kind-of as much in the kids' face as it is up in northern Minnesota. But it is also-like, there's definitely opportunities to explore and to see it, and to live it here, it just- because it's quite as obvious and apparent it kind of takes a specific kid with specific advisor to really bring it to their attention or for them to get interested in it versus other contests are, you know, the opportunities are a little bit more obvious, so the kids kind-of pick it up on their own (personal communication, March 12, 2015).

If not for the environment people do move to the area, as mentioned above, for employment. Among the participants this commonly meant a teaching position or opening in their field of interest. However, there is a broader trend of people moving to the area to work specifically at processing facilities. Minnesota follows the trend among the Great Plains states which, due to their historical reliance on an agriculture economy, have been affected in similar ways by the modern day expansion of agriculture to larger operations whereby technology replaces the traditional workforce. Willmar's farms have steadily consolidated with fewer farmers with more land per farm. As evidenced by Beth's comments regarding her grandparent's land that is no longer a farm. Furthermore, participant Danielle spoke of her family's hog operation: "When we first got started we were a farrow-to-finish facility kinda-of like, you know, everybody was back then in the late 80's early 90's. [...] But as the industry has changed we have transitioned to being a specialized unit. [...] And then we have a handful of offsite facilities that we finish at" (personal communication, March 12, 2015). In turn, the white population of area's traditional heritage such as German, Swedish, and Norwegian immigrants of the late

1800's, are moving to more urban areas" (Hellerstein et al., 2002). This follows the national trend of "young people leaving rural areas for urban areas after high school" (Hanneman, 2010, p. 9).

In response to the general depopulation of these areas, processing facilities - an industry that partners with agriculture - have hired greater numbers of new immigrants. This trend has been reflected in the latest census numbers in Minnesota where despite the largest immigration population living in the Twin Cities metropolitan region, a fifth of this population resides in the state's rural areas. Kandiyohi county, and more specifically Willmar, is one such area in the State. Willmar is a, "small rural city experience[ing] population growth via immigration, situated in a rural western Minnesota county experiencing overall population decline" (Hanneman, 2010, p. 3). Just as Beth compared Willmar to Faribault, MN for its similar demographics and meat processing plant, so did the author of this report. With hog processing, feed mills, etc. Willmar's largest employer has longtime been the Jennie-O turkey processor. As one participant noted, when someone speaks of Willmar they should mention Jennie-O, "because that's like why Willmar's here pretty much" (Andy, personal communication, March 6, 2015). As of 2013, Jennie-O was the largest employer of the area in large part responsible for the Mexican and Somali immigrant that population has been on the rise since the 1990's (Labor Force Report). The 2000 census listed Willmar as the third largest Latino community in Minnesota (Hanneman, 2010). More recently, as of 2013 the county's racial makeup was comparable to that of the State overall. The county's population who identified as white was above the State's percentage (95% as compared to 86% across Minnesota), but the percentage who identify as Hispanic or Latino was

dramatically higher than that in the State overall (11% in Kandiyohi County versus 5% in Minnesota) (Syken, 2006).

These trends have had their impact on the community that had otherwise historically fit the description of a mid-size rural farming town. For example, Willmar's boys cross country team advanced to national-level recognition in 2006 due to five new runners. All five were recent Somali immigrants to the area, part of the approximately "1,000 Somalis, made refugees by civil war, [who] have come to Willmar over the last decade" (Syken, 2006). Deeper implications for Willmar's immigration wave were studied in thesis work titled, *When Race Colors the Prairie*. In this report, the author notes that, "the presence of people of color presents a challenge to rural whites' notion of what it means to live in a small town [...] the presence of immigrants of color working, living, and shopping downtown challenges their sense of Willmar as a small, rural town" (Hanneman, 2010, p. 66). Just as Andy noted how Willmar is the bigger city with "a very different feel" due to its diversity, the presence of multiple cultural heritages in a relatively small space changes one's sense of a place. Hanneman elaborates on this idea by writing, "the Other makes it the opposite of small town, more like a city where 'diversity' is the norm. Residents strive to explain how and why their community changed and continues to change, in order to reconcile this challenge to their sense of place" (2010, p. 66-67).

Both participants, Andy and Danielle pointed to Willmar's cultural diversity, when describing the rurality of the area, or rather that lack of feeling rural. To Andy, the town's diversity is what makes Willmar "the big city" in the area. He describes the difference by saying, "you know with the diversity [...] the Somali and the Hispanic and

water, there's a very different feel ten miles this way or ten miles that way" (personal communication, March 6, 2015). Danielle, who grew up in Faribault, Minnesota, sees Willmar as being very similar because of their "newcomer populations" with "a really high Hispanic population and a really high Somali population" (personal communication, March 12, 2015). This relative 'unfamiliarity' with the population prompted more urban feelings of Willmar and loss, or at least a change in what had historically been recognized as a typical Midwestern small town.

Open Landscape Provides Familiarity. Moving from what drew participants to the area, there are similarities to what has kept them there, or the anchors to the place. The ability to live, if not in the most beautiful natural area, an area that is able to offer some 'wildness' and wildlife, while also allowing for a sense of community. While all participants voiced environmental preference for areas such as northern Minnesota that are known for its nature-based amenities, participants began to speak to the roots that have since kept them there. Participants' descriptions of the natural features of the area, point out how while there is a great shift in the cultural and social characteristics of the area, there still remains many of the area's 'natural' characteristics. As such, attempts to retain a sense of identity lie in the preservation of these areas if no longer it's cultural heritage. For example, Beth describes New London as being a small, rural town because of its downtown area.

We've got this great sort-of dense downtown that's, that's reasonably walkable and is, really tiny for the size of the community, um, this is one of the things that I think is unique for the town of New London- that for population of our town, our downtown is very small. And in some ways that's a disadvantage, but when you look at a lot of prairie towns, um, their downtown's are sort-of expansive, and their populations are shrinking and, and for us our population is growing and our downtown is very small (personal communication, March 6, 2015).



Figure 7. View of downtown New London.



Photo 8. Neer Park boat ramp and lake's turnaround for waterski boats.

As descriptions such as these illustrate, rural planning - as opposed to the more well known urban planning initiatives serve an equal vital role in these areas. In a report published by the Minnesota Planning and Environmental Quality Board there is the suggestion of proper zoning practices. Proper zoning allows for a balance between natural and unnatural areas, which, if carefully planned, can promote a sustainable community. The authors consider the differences between rural and urban settings based on their differing needs. For rural areas they suggest defining 'urban growth boundaries'

that consolidate businesses and urban construction to the town’s central downtown area thereby protecting the “small town quality of life” (“From Policy to Reality”, 2000, p. 2). As Beth alluded to, the vibrancy of a small town’s downtown is closely linked to the life of the community. As these residents seek to retain their ‘sense of place’, something as tangible as the design of Main Street can serve crucial role.

However, when turning to the familiar physical features of the area, all participants discussed the openness of the area. Particularly when describing feeling out of place in other areas, participants commonly referred to the horizons, plains, and fields as familiar natural sights when they returned home (see Table 1).

Table 1
Category: Descriptors of Place

Theme	Supporting Quotes
Openness of the landscape	<p>I kinda realized this when I was in New Jersey - the plains, the open. So like, like you know really that, that open space is like, “oh look at the sunset” well you have to, you know, in New Jersey in the east coast you have to, you have to find the sun. Like there’s trees. [...] As opposed to the plains (Andy).</p> <p>We lived in the trees outside of Ironton, and it was strange for my children and myself coming back to the prairies of Marshall. It’s the opposite of claustrophobia cause you’re used to being surrounded and not seeing the horizon. And all the sudden the horizon is-is so far away it’s just...you know, I never had that feeling before cause I had never lived in a forest! (Connor).</p> <p>One of the comments that Jeff, my husband made at one point was, we were driving back from Porter- from where I grew up- and at some point he looks around him as we’re driving through, you know, you’re average southwest Minnesota farm country, and he said, “Man! This landscape is so industrialized!”. And...I - and that gave me pause! I was like, “Wait! this is not an industrial park! We’re driving through the countryside!” But when you look closely, you realize, “Oh! he’s right! This is extremely industrialized”. Just because acres, upon acres, upon acres of monoculture in straight lines...and power lines and, uh, gravel roads in straight lines in a grid, and , and, you know, machinery, and equipment and large, you know, large steel buildings, and it’s a very industrial landscape (Beth).</p>

Maintaining this agricultural landscape therefore extends beyond the livelihood of the farmers producing on the land, but rather serves as a foundation to how this place is

known by it's inhabitants. Balancing between the farmland and more 'natural' environments therefore continues to be a challenge, if not for the amount of land available, then for the prevailing sentiments tied to its use. Understandings such as this are at the root of farmland retention programs that seek to counter the urban sprawl of growing regional centers such as Willmar. Reports by USDA highlight other reasons besides commodity production why farmland should remain a mainstay of the American frontier. They list national food security, the rural culture, and prevention of urban sprawl as reasons to prevent the continuing decline of our farmland (Hellerstein et al., 2002). The report further highlights what is termed "non-market outputs" of agricultural land which include "open space, scenic beauty of rural landscapes, wildlife habitat, and environmental quality" (p. 41). Very similar to the descriptors used by participants as seen above. There are a variety of land acquisition programs dedicated to farmland there are also a growing number of land acquisition programs seeking to preserve areas of native prairie, endangered wetlands etc. As such, finding a balance between either between the more 'natural' and agricultural lands in our rural areas continues to be a cultural as well as environmental dilemma.

Outdoor Activities Connect People to Place. Many participants describe outdoor activities they are able to do in this area that they would otherwise be unable to do. Activities such as hunting, fishing, horseback riding were all introduced to participants at a young age and have been able to continue. Fred used the term 'outdoors' to describe this area, and continued to describe the type of outdoor activities in which his students participate.

I think of my students, I mean, they just live and breathe outdoor life. [...] I teach math and I was trying to get some simple data from them just asking them

[...] “Ok, who goes ice fishing?” and I’d say 90-some percent of the kids, girls included, threw their hands up, and I’m just like, “Wow!” and I’m learning this is just a big part of their culture (personal communication, March 12, 2015).

Table 2
Category: Descriptors of Place

Theme	Supporting Quotes
Outdoor Activities	<p>And growing up in North Dakota - hunting, and fishing and that sort of thing its like ... I think that really is part of like part of why we’re in this area and why we kinda like this area, like its that familiar, um, what you grew up with and what you know (Andy).</p> <p>Skiing is very important to me. [Any summer outdoor activities?] Horses. We’ve got four. We board them. We go on trail rides and shows. Nothing big. Mostly local shows, the girls are in 4H [...] Similar addiction. Really is, yeah! [...] Cause they’ve all got personalities. It’s similar to skiing cause you just go. Get out and you go. But with the horse, you’ve got an animal that’s got it’s own mindset that you have to try to read. Instead of reading the snow conditions and the trail [...] They’re both kinda similar cause you find a lot of solace out there (Connor).</p>

Personally, Fred has discovered birding after moving to the area. The unique grassland ecosystem and the relatively few birders in the area, has meant his sightings carry a particular importance to other birders in the State. Because of this, he believes he is becoming more environmentally connected to this place. Instead of seeking out more common wildlife areas, he has become, “more interested in actually documenting and seeing stuff here” wanting “to tell the story of the Yohi Wildlife Management Area or Foot Lake” for example. While these activities could take place elsewhere, their import or connection to one’s sense of identity is seemingly just as dependent on the place in which it occurs. See Table 1 for further descriptors of the area through the lens of outdoor activities.

Environmental Issues and Actions of the Place

Next, participants were asked about key environmental issues and activities. Participants’ response were particularly varied regarding the issues and actions they felt

were important to the area. After transcribing and reading through these parts of the interviews, I divided the topics into three categories based on how they interact with the place. These categories are as follows: 1) specific to this place (i.e. particular businesses, organizations etc. that are uniquely in this area); 2) because of this place (i.e. issues affected by the area's natural and social features, potentially shared with other places); and 3) universal issues neither specific to nor because of this place (i.e. climate change).

This third, 'universal' category, while mentioned by three participants, is not a theme of this research because it does not align with any of the research questions proposed. As one participant pointed out that while climate change is her biggest environmental concern, it's hard "to think about the environment on a local level". However, just as it appears to be playing out on the national and international levels, there is debate on the existence of climate change in this area. Connor suggested that perhaps because of Minnesota's location there is greater disbelief in the gravity of the issue. He commented that, "we're at a bit of a disadvantage cause we've got all this water and we're in very safe geologically stable area so we don't get the dramatic sense of change that you might get if you're near an ocean and its flooding more and more often. Um, we get more dramatic storms! But that doesn't seem to- [change people's minds]" (personal communication, March 12, 2015). There otherwise seems to be too many factors to pinpoint a reason why this debate exists in this area. Connor also referred to the area's religious beliefs and conservative culture when describing the climate change debate in this area.

[...] religion and politics- those are two big driving forces. I was unaware of just - when we first moved here how much of a conservative religious area it was too. So I have many students who don't even want to hear the word evolution, or climate change, or, um, Big Bang [laughs]. It's not just Christian, some of the

Islamic students too, they say, “Muhammad in the Koran does not talk about the nebular hypothesis! You-you can’t be teaching that!”. So it’s conservative all across the spectrum of religion! [laughs] So if you are set in your conservative ways, that if God’s not telling you that I need to be a better steward, then I don’t need to. But a lot of conservative religions have been saying that the Bible is talking about stewardship and how you need to care for the land [...] So if you really want to represent your religion well then you should take better care of what God has provided you with. As opposed to, “well we’re the pinnacle of creation so we can do whatever we want!” and that’s a perspective that some take (personal communication, March 12, 2015).

As the focus of this research is the rural landscape and it’s effects on environmental issues and actions, the remaining topics will focus on those that are *specific to* or *because of* the place.

Where Land Use and Water Quality Issues Meet. Because of this area has such varied land and water uses, issues surrounding their use were described by participants. For every participant, use of the land and its impacts on the water was an important environmental issue. The most common land issues mentioned were agricultural practices. Participants who were not directly connected to farming knew that farming practices, specifically the chemicals applied to the land and the soil erosion were key topics. For participants personally, however, there was greater emphasis on what people put on their lawns or how they maintained their shorelines. In one example, Andy brought up New London's nationally recognized waterski team, *The Little Crow Ski Team*. Utilizing a small lake protected from winds, the ski team both practices and performs on Mud lake, also known as Crow River Mill Pond. Andy describes how this popular area attraction has caused debate as to proper use of the lake and environmental impacts to the shoreline and water. While only an isolated example, it is debates such as this that permeate environmental issue discussions in this area.

Little Crow Ski team, you know like the big boats that, you know, they, the channel, like we went to the Music Fest with our 30 foot canoe and I was going down there and some guy's like, "NO!!" he's like, "Don't go much further!" because our 34 foot boat is bigger than most boats that they put in on the boat ramp by Near Park. He's like, "it drops off to about 20 or 30 feet" cause, [...] there's a couple pretty big engine- and when they're going and they're pulling five guys bare footing and they're making that turn in that little- [...] they're gouging out [the shore] [...]. You know and just the impact of the erosion and the wave action.

But people have said that the ski team is more important than the nature of the bank. You know and the people along the river, like right across the way there's a big sign [...] that says, you know, "75,000 dollar shoreline restoration that I had to pay because of the ski show" you know, because of the waves and stuff [...] Yeah, but its good for the community its good for the- the ski team brings in [business]" [...] Yeah so what's the- the tradeoff. Then again, you look at the place where the sign is up and its like, "Oh yeah!" you've got you know, no prairie plan- no, uh, cattails, no bullrushes, uh, you've gotta very nice, green, manicured lawn there's no tall grass prairie with the root system holding stuff in [...] So it's ...yeah, the give and take (personal communication, March 6, 2015).

This example illustrates the multi-faceted nature of these debates. Water use affects shorelines, while practices on land filter into the water, and all are affected by the various expectations of use by people whose recreational hobbies if not livelihoods depend on these resources.

This example further describes, what research has also concluded, that environmentally responsible actions necessitate a personal connection to a natural resource of concern. Generally, pro-environmental actions are difficult to encourage unless a direct connection to the personal benefits are made. In a 2012 dissertation, *Losing Our Lakes: An Assessment of the Human Dimensions of Lakeshore Landowner Shoreland Management*, shoreline landowners' behaviors around shoreline restoration efforts were mapped throughout the State. Their results yielded that, in regards to shoreline restoration, "impersonal communication was not as effective" (Rudberg,

2012). Rather it would be more effective to promote a healthy lake for its relation to human activities (i.e. swimming and boating). Another study of Minnesota lakeshore landowners' attitudes towards native aquatic plants found that landowners rarely make their choices based on the health of the ecosystem, but rather how they would benefit personally. The authors conclude that this is an important consideration for those trying to communicate the importance of proper shoreline management to property owners (Schroeder & Fulton, 2013). This type of communication is a particularly important for this region that now must address human actions as they pertain to land use, shoreline restoration and, most recently, infestation of aquatic invasive species.

Table 3

Category: Environmental Issues and Solutions

Theme	Supporting Quotes
Land and Water Practices	<p>And runoff from farming is a bigger problem than anybody wants to admit because that is our main food source- er our main income source I should say. Oops! My big mistake! (Connor).</p> <p>So in this area...I-water quality is the big one [...] People's property values are tied to the water quality. And that's top of mind in people's- um, agriculture is a- if, maybe not in this immediate area, in the wider areas of topic-um attention and conversation and economic, uh, and economic engines, so thinking back to the water conversations I have, farming practices is widely, widely discussed. Um, people in this area are sportsmen and women, and so they're interested in, um, the habitat that's surrounding- there's a lot cases surrounding water, and um, lakes and streams, so, um so it goes a lot of different angles. But I think the water in this area is pretty commonly brought up just because streams are connected to all the waterways, and its all interconnected so- so people talk about it (Beth).</p> <p>[Biggest environmental concern?] Groundwater contamination, yeah. Cause that's, um, I feel like, um, obviously I'm probably somewhat to very biased in-in that I think that my dad is a really good, responsible farmer and all animal production- obviously there's issues with that, so it's a big concern and I think that my dad takes it very, very seriously and very educated on how to deal with that [...] The way we run our facility, it's not that much more work but it is, you know, just a little bit more work so then a lot of people cut corners and then that becomes an issue (Danielle).</p>

You know we deal with things like manure management all the time. And disposing of- properly disposing of wastes, and ... carcasses, and you know all kinds of things that have to be dealt with in agriculture, you know, that's, uh, a day-to-day thing for myself. You know we've got 35 cows and, and uh, some of them are pastured in the summer, some of em dry lotted and, uh, you know, we've got to be concerned about waste and, uh all that kinda stuff. You know, proper application of manure, and - those are all big ticket items! (Ed).

Area farming practices are yet another example of this. While Connor and Andy brought up runoff from farming and tiling as the main agricultural issues, the farmers interviewed, Danielle and Ed focused primarily on waste management and its direct impact on groundwater. While all parties agree on the issue, there is debate on the best practices for environmental health of the area. See Table 3 for a comparison of these comments.

The issues over use of land extend into renewable energy discussions. Both wind and solar energy has become relatively popular alternative sources of energy here. However, while both Connor and Beth support these technologies, they described why more consideration is needed for the cost of the land they occupy. For example, Connor's brother lives by Marshall in the southwest part of the state. There, they are trying to avoid adding a solar park that would occupy an "entire quarter section of really expensive farmland". Instead, that productive land could serve a better purpose, and the solar panels could be distributed onto people's homes.

These land and water issues are prominent concerns for not only participants, but also the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR), academic researchers, and area news outlets. The unique location of Kandiyohi county on the border of two of the State's ecosystems, means that farming practices on the land typical of southwestern Minnesota more directly affect the watery lake and river system that typifies the state moving to the north and east. Ed pointed to this convergence first when asked to

describe the area: “Well, [...] we’re just entering the lake country so, you know, we’re in the very important part of the state. You know, if you compare it to other areas, there’s areas that are, that have less water [...] for recreation, and, fishing, and hunting. We’re just in a unique area and we’re just entering the -you know- kinda the heart of the lakes going north. You know we have Sibley State Park. And we have...some cool stuff right in through here” (personal communication, March 12, 2015). As his and other participants’ descriptions indicate, the location of this area forces a confluence of issues. With such a variety of uses and users, solutions to environmental issues must meet a multitude of demands.

With three of North America’s eight biomes, Minnesota has a natural diversity that is home to a wide range of plant and animal life. As participant Fred has since noted after moving to the area, part of this uniqueness lies in the prairied landscape that has made for productive agricultural land. In *Natural Areas: Protecting A Vital Community Asset*, the Minnesota DNR and the Natural Heritage and Nongame Research Program iterate how the state’s grassland biome - where Kandiyohi County resides - as a host to native prairies which house hundreds of species of flowering plants, many species of grasses and sedges, along with several species of mammals and birds (Allmann, 1997). *Natural Areas* further imparts the importance of these ecosystems by explaining that, “more than half of the state-listed rare birds are seasonal or year-round residents of prairies and prairie wetlands” (Allmann, 1997, p. 21).

As Fred knowingly described, land acquisition is the primary tool used by the state and private sectors to protect this ecosystem by reserving land in this biome as preserves and natural areas. However, since only 4% of the State’s land is under this sort



Photo 9. Land in Conservation Reserve in front of Willmar Senior High School, One of the City's two wind turbines pictured in the background.

of protection, these authors support education as an additional tool to be used by the public that, “offers perspective - the ability to more objectively and realistically evaluate the relative merits of different courses of action” (Allmann, 1997, p. 59). Willmar High School has participated in both in land acquisition and education therein. Ed, who teaches many of the wildlife courses offered at the High School, pointed out the school was built on 160 acres of natural land. Some of which, about nine acres, is still in production - which he is in charge of maintaining. The school also has some of its property in the conservation reserve for which he maintains enrollment (see Photo 4).

Environmental Actions Require Personal Motivation. As participants continued to share different environmental issues and actions, a commonality of personal motivation began to emerge. Often, participants described economic drivers for or against actions that would otherwise be environmentally beneficial. In some cases, it was for the potential profit that environmental actions were taken. These included investing in the new Bushmills Ethanol Inc. plants that have gone up in the area. Ed had

a unique perspective as a farmer who could have had the opportunity to partially own the plant:

[Have the ethanol plants impacted you at all?] Economically, it's been good. You know I've sold to that ethanol plant. My brother sells to the ethanol plant a lot, you know. My brother-in-laws have shares and, they've done well. Uh we did have shares in the, in the ethanol plant in Buffalo Lake that went under, you know, we lost our butts on that little deal, but, uh, so. You know especially when, uh, gas was high. You know? It was, it was a drive for some corn prices (personal communication, March 12, 2015).

What was originally touted as a new renewable energy source (and has since proven less so) by companies, participants did not cite those environmental considerations. Rather, these ethanol plants were discussed in terms of only their economic benefit, both personally and for the area. This was also true for recycling. Andy pointed out that people in the area will recycle if it's "easy enough and makes sense", but that, "a lot of people aren't recycling to save the planet. They're recycling so they pay less for their garbage" (personal communication, March 6, 2015). Even the effectiveness of the recycling initiatives at Fred's school were based on convenience, where the school's 'green team' "made sure that there are color recycle bins in every classroom and they're right next to the trash can so recycling is becoming somewhat automatic to kids" (Fred, personal communication, March 13, 2015). These drivers indicate that while traditional environmental education may focus on effects on the environment, it is the impacts to humans that would dictate the effectiveness of such education in this area.

These conversations continued to focus how these issues impacted the people of the area, and how people's personal motivations dictated their solutions. Considering the productiveness of the area's soils participants were asked their thoughts on local

food systems as an environmental initiative in the area. Both Beth and Connor agreed that this was a potentially important issue.

It should be our main food source! But instead we grow the food and ship it elsewhere, and take the money and buy the food, ship the money elsewhere to get the food we could be growing. The monohybrid- the monocultures of soybean and corn- cause we rotate soybeans with corn, is that really rotation? Oh! I, sure there's lots of city folk including city-city folk in Willmar who would imagine the food they buy at the grocery store is being grown some- in a field near here. Even though the reality is it probably has traveled at least 1,000 miles to get to the store. Then has another 10-15 miles to their plate. Just a lot of people aren't aware of where their food is coming from, and that it's not grown around here. You don't eat the corn that's grown around here. Except for the sweet corn from the stands (Connor).

However, both participants cited the lack of community energy and interest in the issue.

Recent efforts in Willmar have tried bringing a 'community-owned grocery' store (or COG) to Willmar. The economic drive and resident support was not enough, and as of February of this year the initiative unfortunately began the process of dissolution.

Connor felt that, "COG should've been going years ago, but people have to invest more than just money, it takes time and intent. You have to be intentional. Because it's a lot easier just to go to the supermarket and get what you want as opposed to going to COG to pick up what's available." Living in New London, Beth spoke to the effect this initiative had on their own initiative to bring a grocery store to their town. She describes, "In Willmar I see there being energy and a lot of people but I also see them struggle and fail. [...] There hasn't been much of a local foods movement in New London - we've got a farmer's market, we've got whatever but that's not a big part of where I see the the energy behind community development going" (Beth).

Without a local foods initiative in the area, Beth nonetheless does describe a greater interest on the part of the general public to engage in conversations such as

healthy eating (and in part local foods) as opposed to more ‘blatant’ environmental issues. Initiations for health, such as healthy eating and biking, also provide this sort of ‘back door’ environmentalism, or as Beth said, “a win, win without having to approach it from the environmental side” (personal communication, March 6, 2015). This may be a more universal trend in environmental efforts, but approaching such initiatives from a standpoint of how it impacts human health and actions appears to determine whether or not they’ll be effective in this particular area.

These motivations are discussed more broadly in reports throughout the state. Many maintain that in general, pro-environmental actions are difficult to encourage unless a direct connection to the personal benefits are made. A 2012 dissertation out of the University of Minnesota, *Losing Our Lakes: An Assessment of the Human Dimensions of Lakeshore Landowner Shoreland Management*, sought to map shoreline landowners’ behaviors around shoreline restoration efforts throughout the State. Their results yielded that, in regards to shoreline restoration, “impersonal communication was not as effective” (Rudberg, 2012). Rather it would be more effective to promote a healthy lake for its relation to human activities (i.e. swimming and boating). Another study of Minnesota lakeshore landowners’ attitudes towards native aquatic plants found that landowners rarely make their choices based on the health of the ecosystem, but rather how they would benefit personally. The authors conclude that this is an important consideration for those trying to communicate the importance of proper shoreline management to property owners (Schroeder & Fulton, 2013). This type of communication is a particularly important message for this region that now must address

human actions as they pertain to land use, shoreline restoration and most recently, infestation of aquatic invasive species.

Summary

Understanding the role the natural environment plays in this area proves to be particularly important in how this place is both understood and protected. Participants' descriptions of the rural landscape included as many social features as they did natural. Even though they described a prairie, grassland ecosystem, their connectedness to this landscape relied on social aspects such as their memories of it as a child, how they made their livelihood, and the recreational activities it allowed. The interplay between the natural and social features continued as participants next responded to what the environmental issues and actions were in the area. For the most part, the issues discussed could be ascribed to social contingencies. For example, the community's participation in renewable energy was contingent on what made economic sense, while the absence of activism events were contingent on sheer population size. The discussions never centered on environmental issues for the sake of the environment. Instead, the area's environment was presented more as a platform for human activity. The extent to which issues in the environment affected these activities made them more or less concerning to the participants. These were activities that were not necessarily important to the community as a whole, rather personal activities that reflected the descriptions participants had of the place.

Such variety in descriptions and environmental concerns, even in a relatively small geographical area, shines light on the shortcomings of prescribing a standardized environmental message to areas such as these. Instead it illuminates the importance of

place-specific, or place-based education where topics address not only an area's natural environment but also the culture of its people. These implications and their significance thereof are discussed in the next and final chapter.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

This final chapter discusses the results of this study as they answer the purpose and research questions established in chapter one. Connections to the literature review of chapter 2, grounds these findings in the broader field. Lastly, this chapter composes implications of this research and poses suggestions for future studies.

Summary

This study sought to explore the culture of an agricultural landscape through the phenomena of resident environmental attitudes and behaviors. Using the ethnographic approach to phenomenology, this study found that this place is understood socially, an understanding that then was found to strongly guide the environmental attitudes and behaviors of its people. The primary theme to emerge from this research was the reliance on a variety of social constructs and little on the natural environment which seemed to serve only as a backdrop on which the social activities could take place. When describing this area, participants described varying levels of ‘rurality’ that depended on population size, distance from regional centers, and comparisons to other towns. The area’s increasing racial diversity was also cited when discussing the changing face of rural life. Participants reflected on the openness of the fields and prairies that were familiar to them from growing up in similar landscapes. Such familiarity was steeped in memories of family who have continued to influence participants’ view of the landscape if not where they lived. Often participants chose to live in this area for its closeness to family or equidistance between their family and their spouse’s family. Furthermore, outdoor activities that were often a part of their childhood continued to serve as an connecting point to their place today. While participants described activities that are not

specific to the area (such as hunting, fishing, and birding), it was the uniqueness of the prairie-pothole region discovered through these activities that spurred a sense of pride and connection to the area.

Social influencers continued to dominate discussion of environmental issues and behaviors in the area. Because of the convergence of both interconnected waterways and expansive fields, this region stages many debates centered on proper uses of these resources. User groups vary between those who recreate on the water, to those who make their living off of the land. These debates were consistently mentioned by my participants and throughout the literature. While participants' primary environmental concerns were very similar (water quality and land use), their proposed solutions differed drastically. However, throughout these discussions, participants described the need to elicit personal motivations when promoting responsible environmental behaviors in the area. Perhaps reflective of the utilitarian nature of this landscape, environmental behaviors were often described in terms of the economic advantages and disadvantages they offered rather than the environmental. Furthermore, they align with the findings of Brehm, Eisenhower, & Koranic (2006) who, as discussed in Chapter 2, found people with 'social' connections to place valued more the culture and identity, and the health of their community rather than protection and health of its natural resources. These findings are very familiar to past discussions I've had with coworkers from the area. Often these economic concerns supersede personal gains and losses, and instead based on the understanding that such economic streams are necessary to the survivability of these otherwise dwindling rural towns. This variety of factors means environmental work in this area must not only appease a wide range of user groups, but must also meet

a variety of economic goals too. Just as ‘place’ is understood by Hummon (1992) to be comprised of the ecological, social and economic factors, it seems the environmental actions of this area must also consider these three factors.

Surprising Findings

Acknowledging my own bias as a researcher who grew up in this area, I consider a certain number of these findings to be surprising. Because of my personal experiences in this place, I had developed my own answers to the questions posed by this research. As such, there are a few resulting findings that either contradict what I expected to hear or are altogether not addressed.

The ideas for this research began with conversations and observations I had made of my hometown. From these I set out to understand the connection between this area and the environmental issues and actions prioritized there. The questions arose out of differences between environmental solutions I witnessed in communities in the southwest region of Minnesota and those promoted in the more urban Minneapolis, St. Paul districts. Such experiences prompted me to believe similar comparisons would be made by participants in my study. Instead, the data suggests participants made stronger comparisons between their more ‘industrialized’, populated landscape, and the ‘environmental’, forested northern region of Minnesota.

Furthermore, while agriculture was a reoccurring topic, farmers and farming practices were only a part of the user groups mentioned. Participants readily recognized ‘everyday’ users as just as much a part of the area’s environmental issues. Many of these user groups were missing from the rural literature where agriculture is assumed to still be the mainstay of these rural towns.

Thirdly, there was more discussion on the desires and enthusiasms of the community rather than focus on particular issues. This meant what was prioritized by the community (through campaigns, fundraising initiatives, etc...) was prioritized by the individual. Proximity to various towns also meant there was comparisons made and repercussions felt between towns and their initiatives. Surprisingly for me, there was little mention of the prominent wind turbines in the area (now about seven years old) included in these community discussions.

Lastly, though not too surprisingly, was the mention of the logistical considerations for certain environmental actions. Considering this place was so largely a part of the participants' lives, I had expected less consideration for the logistical setbacks to maintaining its health. Instead, such limitations were enough to deter individuals who lack the fundamental variables of time and energy.

Implications

In such a unique region where neither the natural nor built environments dominate, we have the potential to reach an audience that is neither separated from a human community nor entirely immersed in one. This can offer the perfect grounds for place-based environmentalism. As explored in Chapter 2, education rooted in place is not a new concept, but has long been known as place-based education (PBE). PBE seeks to connect students to their communities by learning about the socio-cultural and environmental qualities of their surroundings. Often PBE utilizes project-based, hands-on curricula that encourage a deep connection with the material and concepts. Use of such methods closely align with the environmental learning cycle that is core to environmental education, allowing PBE to nicely align with EE. As discussed in Chapter

2, the educational objectives of PBE can also further those of EE. Several studies have shown that an increased sense of and appreciation for one's place promotes an increase in environmentally responsible behaviors. However, environmental education as it is currently practiced is not tapping into place-based education, and instead, as Brown (2009) wrote, is not allowing for the connections between individual, place, and community of practice.

To expand the reach of environmental education through PBE, requires a current understanding of diversity of communities. To date, research has focused on areas that are urban, suburban and even the amenity-based rural communities, but have left the agricultural rural landscape largely unexamined. This research can serve as a step in that direction - a current snapshot of a culture largely overlooked, focused on a phenomena (i.e. environmental issues and behaviors) in a crucial time. Having explored this first step, environmental educators have the possibility to create stronger connections between the people of this place and the environmental education and messaging delivered there. Therefore, with research such as this and future studies, environmental educators can be primed to deliver more effective place-based environmental education in such areas.

Recommendations for Future Research

The influence my own landscape has proven to influence my environmental views and practices. Through understanding this, I've seen its influence in my approach to environmental opportunities in general and how they can conflict with the influences of other landscapes. Accounting for the landscape, and the cultural contingencies therein, environmental issues and opportunities are met realistically and therefore more

sustainably as opposed to discrete events disassociated from such influencers. This understanding was reflected in the participants in this study. Whether or not they were understood, participants recounted an undeniable link between their landscape and pro-environmental attitudes and behaviors. While much was gained from this study, still more could be learned with further research.

This study was limited in time and scope, allowing for only six of the projected eight interviews to be carried out. Additional interviews, and document analysis are needed to provide a deeper understanding of both this area and its environmental issues and actions. These would not only allow for greater variety of perspectives, but would also include varying demographics of the area. While this study focused on those who have a known knowledge of environmental work in the area, further research could include those who don't so as to understand what the broader population may or may not consider in regards to the area's environment. This study's scope also focused on an age range of working adults. Future studies could expand interviews to both those yet in high school, and retirees in the area.

Another route for further research would include conducting similar analysis in a different landscape. Such a study would allow the comparisons to the rural, agricultural landscape in this study to move beyond speculation.

In any of these future studies it would be important to maintain a participant base that identifies with this place. To lose that variable would mean losing that connection between our roots, or as Orr wrote, "what resonates deepest in us" and the actions we take to preserve them. Without a deep personal connection to the place, the expressed

issues and behaviors would not reflect the intricacies and interdependencies that only true care and knowledge yield.

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APPENDIX A LETTER OF INTENT

Hello <participant name>,

Thank you for taking the time to participate in this project. As a master's student of the University of Minnesota Duluth, my goal is for the the process and findings of this project to be used for the benefit of others in the field of Environmental Education. Specifically this project aims to to identify *the pro-environmental attitudes and behaviors that are specific to a rural place-identity*.

Your name and identifying information will be kept confidential. The interview, and the information therein will be used to evaluate these effects. These effects will also be evaluated throughout information gathered through publications and websites from the area.

You have been selected to participate because of your history with the area and knowledge of the field. <specific past work and initiatives>. For this reason, your unique perspective is greatly valued.

I will be aiming to interview <dates>. If this is an opportunity in which you are able and willing to participate, please respond with a date that works best for you. Agreement to participate will serve as verbal consent for your interview to be used anonymously as a part of this research. Please let me know also if you are unable or have further questions I can answer. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Becca Bell
Master of Environmental Education Candidate

APPENDIX B INTERVIEW GUIDE



Types of interview questions I'll ask:

- When did you move to the area? Why?
- Would you encourage people to live here - raise their families here?
- What do you do outside here?
- To what degree are you attached to and identify with this place? What contributes to this attachment/identity?

This study seeks to pinpoint the culmination of three themes: place as it is reflected in one's **place identity** to a **rural landscape**, and the environment as communicated through individuals' **environmental attitudes & behavior**.

In other words, I'm looking to ask questions within two categories:

1) Do you identify with this area?

EXAMPLE: Based on the following definition, do you consider yourself to be an inhabitant here: Inhabitants, "bear the mark of their places, [...] in patterns of speech, through dress and behavior. Uprooted, they get homesick [...they] make good neighbors and honest citizens. [...they] are the bedrock of a stable community".

2) What are your attitudes & behaviors toward the

The interview will be conversation-based, so we may not touch on all these questions, and may talk about others!